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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the point that female identities continue to form using the reference point of the male image or identity, a study juxtaposed a qualitative research project and the expressions of patriarchy represented in two television milk commercials. Subjects, 12 sixth-grade girls at a small Catholic elementary school in central New York, were interviewed in weekly group meetings and individually. The study examined how the 12 subjects made meaning out of their schooling experience and identified various themes that emerged from the group sessions. The study also analyzed two milk commercials which depict the plight of two "unsuccessful" early teens who begin to drink milk and become "successful" older teens for genderizing of content. Findings suggest the need for a critical feminist pedagogy where students delve into the politics of difference and representation to realize that all knowledge is partial and ridden with complex relations of power. (Contains 18 references.) (NH)

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by Michelle R. Maher

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Men Do and Women Are: Sixth Grade Girls, Media Messages & Identity

by Michelle R. Maher

Paper presented at the Center for the Study of Communication's Mainstream(s) and Margins Conference, April 3, 1992, Amherst, M.A.

This paper juxtaposes a qualitative research project exploring the perspectives of 12 sixth grade girls (11 middle, middle-lower class Caucasians and one Asian) and the expressions of patriarchy represented in two milk commercials. I want to employ the data from the research project in conjunction with the milk commercials to argue that female identities continue to form using the reference point of the male image or identity, their own femininity constructed relative to the concept of masculinity. I emphasis the girls' male-centered orientation to describe the false dichotomy between females and males, the constructedness of gender. This paper examines the social construction of this dichotomy at the sites where school and media participate in constructing gendered identities. Thus I deconstruct gender through analyses of 6th grade girls' talk compared with media messages. In other words, what are the ways girls' talk reflect, respond and are represented in a specific TV commercial and this moment has implications about the situation of gendered identity formation. I suggest that this can begin to happen by getting people to learn to think critically and creatively about their own experiences and ways of understanding social life. It is dangerous not to encourage critical and creative thinking.

This form of critical and creative thinking calls into question the way students think about their own experience while simultaneously raising fundamental questions about what social relationships and actions like teaching should be and what social purposes they might serve (Giroux, 1992). Once people

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become conscious of the political nature of social relationships and experience, they act more deliberately, with intention. One way oppressive, socially constructed ideologies can be transformed into liberatory ones is through a pedagogical framework that creates the conditions for students to reflect critically and creatively on the social and political aspects of their lives. Here, space is created where the dialogic discourses of democracy and equality are continually constructed and the obstacles in the way of a democratic humanity based on equality and justice are named and transcended.

Educators need to make the social constructions of gender, such as the construction of the female identity, problematic. Only through questioning the assumptions about power on which society is based can those assumptions become overt and, therefore, in a position to be consciously reworked.

The concepts of "female" and "male" are frequently taken for granted,. The social construction of and dichotomy between "female" and "male" are concepts that need to be continually deconstructed in order to identify the many complex, integrated, and changing assumptions underlying them. The girls in this study demonstrate aspects of how their "female" identity is being formed. I read the talk of the girls in this study as revelatory of their identities as females. I use the girls' narratives to illustrate and question the central assumption that women are defined against a standard of "man." As Simone de Beauvior points out, "Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being...[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (de Beauvior in Burstyn, 1986). It is this notion that this paper critiques as evidenced in the gendered identities exposed by the girls in the study and by two milk commercials.

Studying Sixth Grade Girls

For a qualitative research project, I set out to understand how girls make meaning out of their schooling experience. I conducted weekly group meetings and individual interviews with 12 sixth grade girls at a small, Catholic elementary school in Central New York.[1] The study's underlying idea was that I would begin to understand what sixth grade female culture in a parochial school is about. Many themes emerged throughout the observations and group sessions. From my field notes I found that most of the girls' interactions were either about the boys or related in some way to the boys in the class. This was interesting since the main topics of our group session concerned the teacher's and the students' role in the classroom and what constituted different types of teachers and teaching. Their male-centeredness was embedded within their behavior, language, and much of our discussions. This clue developed into a conceptual framework with which I could look at the field notes. Two new research questions emerged: "How do the girls think about their role as females in a sixth grade classroom," and "How do sixth grade girls construct their identities as female."

The girls taught me how they understood an integral part of their lives—a piece of the role of the "self" as a female and a sixth grade student in Catholic school. During our discussions I tried to understand how they were forming their identities, what they thought was important, what they wanted to do, how they felt, and how

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[1] Catholic schools are different than public schools in many important ways. One issue that is central to this paper is the influence of Catholicism on the construction of gender identity. Catholicism is a patriarchal institution that, by identifying women as nuns and men as priests, supports the idea that men and women have different relationships to their God. Though this form of patriarchy may be more overt than other forms, patriarchy is still supported as a prevalent social and educational ideology of many public schools. Catholic and public schools have many commonalities. The Catholic experience of patriarchy, as a female, is indicative of the experience in public school with differing manifestations of patriarchy.

they thought they should feel. Through their voices, I found their lived contradictions and the recreation of women's subordination.

The Study

Many themes emerged from the group sessions with the girls. One central theme was the continual focus and reference to the boys as a group and individually on the part by the girls.[2] There was a wide range of this type of reference to the boys in the many topics that we discussed in our group sessions. Here are some examples.

When talking about relationships between girls and girls and girls and boys, reference of the boys emerged:

> "I'm not boy crazy like Renee [another girl in the group]."
>
> "Boys are not nice but they can be friends. They always do things and blame them on you."
>
> "[Boys] are lousy, fat, old, pigs."
>
> "[Boys] think I'm 14 and want to go out," "some are hot,"

When talking about the learning ability of students, some girls remarked:

> "Some [students] have the ability to learn but they don't want to, like Mark."

The subject of the boys even crept into the discussion when the girls were being feminists, they were discovering and naming the inequalities between the genders. The girls also referenced the boys when they talked about the issue of favoritism in the classroom:

> "Mrs. So & So doesn't have any favorites... except the boys."
>
> "The girls aren't favored so they don't do as well."
>
> "Some teachers let boys get away with things."

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[2] I also conducted group sessions with the boys, however to a lesser extent. I found a stark difference in the content of the boys conversations-the hardly mentioned the girls at all.

Another theme that emerged was the way in which the girls controlled each other. The controlling behavior was always within the backdrop of the boys-either the boys were wathcing, the girls performing for them to see or maintaining an "in" group which included the girls that were most conpetitive for male attention. Ways of Seeing, by _____ shows how women grow up not only being conscious of the way males look at them, the male gaze, but watching themselves being watched. Women learn to use the male gaze and become conscious of its continual presence, whether or not they are in the presence of males. The girls seemed to exhibit a similar gaze by controlled each other under the guise of "kidding."

One girl was continually given sighs and "rolls of the eyes" by other girls because she didn't fit in; she was alienated and harassed by other girls in front of both girls and boys. The girls who harrassed her and other girls not in the "in" gropup knew the boys were watching. Controlling behavior may occur for many reasons, however most of it seemed intended to maintain "in group" status among some of the girls and to impress the boys at times.

> "I can't believe the things she says, she just doesn't think before she talks."
>
> "Helen, shut up!"

One element the girls used to control others was by labeling, reaffirming the "outness" of some of the girls.

> "You're so weird, Maria!"
>
> "You are such a goodie-goodie in class, it's when you are always kissing up to the teachers and doing what the teachers want."
>
> "You don't know anything, you don't know what we are talking about, Helen. You are so annoying. Hehehe."

All of these controlling mechanisms that the girls used on other girls were said in a half joking voice. However, the girls explained that when the boys discredited them, the boys were not "kidding:"

"It is different when the girls call you things, but I don't mind if the girls do because they are kidding but the boys aren't."(Again the idea of joking was talked about with reference to male attention).

Some of the girls were very concerned with what the boys thought of them and wanted to change to become what the boys wanted them to be. Others were conscious of their grades and how they should do in school (e.g. working out the contradiction of doing well but thinking that boys should do better than girls).

The girls accounted for differences by assuming that boys did generally better than girls and blaming it on innate differences or favoritism of some sort.

"I think that boys get really good grades and the only reason why is because [teachers] know that boys get a lot of good grades, so they do. There are some exceptions, of course."

"Some boys can memorize forever and ever, and like some girls just can't do that."

Another reason given by the girls was that boys do better better because they are afraid that the boys will bother them-so they don't do as well:

"If you are answering a question or something and a boy hears you, they might think you are stupid. First they [they boys] think you are a smart person and then he'll say stuff like "you don't know anything."

"The boys don't understand us, they are harsher, they judge us differently."

The girls were very sensitive to what the boys thought of them:

"I want to know what [the boys say about me] so I can change. I don't want to annoy anyone."

"If he says something bad about you, then you feel really bad but if he says something good then you will be really happy."

"We (the girls) have to be sensitive to what the boys think."

"If I like someone [a boy] and they said something about, like they said something like they don't like something I do that annoys them, I can change then. Like Kim says I always say "Oh my God," and she helps me out. If a boy says something, I want to know so that I wouldn't annoy them anymore."

The girls felt threatened and were frequently embarrassed (e.g. like when others knew their grades whether they were high or low).

> "It is embarrassing when the teacher says your grade. Then [the boys] will say "I got a higher grade than you, I beat you" or they'll harass you because they are jealous that you got a good grade."

The girls frequently talked, in some way, about the boys and would "tell them everything" about our conversations.

> "We thought that if we told the boys what we were talking about [in the group discussions] then maybe they would tell us what they were talking about."

Though the girls said they were closer to other girls as friends, they competed with each other for attention from the boys. This was evident during my observations of their class. One girl slipped an anonymous "I like you" note into a boy's desk. Some girls would gather at a boy's desk, or approach one only to go back to tell the girls what had gone on (not vice versa). Yet, the girls felt very strongly that favoritism is given to the boys in many ways and that the boys judge them differently. This theme revealed that the girls are specifically geared toward what boys think about them and what boys receive as different from what girls receive. They noted favoritism toward boys in the classroom and were upset that the Catholic school would not let them do the same things as boys. The girls were not allowed to wear what boys were allowed to wear, nor were they allowed to wear long earrings, pantyhose, makeup, and certain types of hair styles. By approaching the boys they received the attention they wanted. It seemed to me that asserting their femininity was a form of resistance to the school's sexist ideology.

> "I think the uniforms [jumpers] are kind of ugly, they [school rules] don't let you wear earrings or ones to right here, [she puts her finger below her ear, not far]."
>
> "You should see the boys, they get to wear other pants and other shirts... we don't." "Boys have more freedom to wear than we do, yea, they can wear any sweater, any tie, they have nice pants."
>
> "I didn't get caught for wearing stockings because I wore socks over them, nobody noticed."
>
> "We're not even allowed to wear makeup."

Teachers' favoritism toward the boys and differential treatment for boys and girls was also noted by the girls. They were very aware of the way in which girls and boys were treated. Yet, even in this feminist moment, the girls'conversation was prevalently centered on males. Though the girls discerned that this differential treatment was unfair they continued to play into the ways women are controlled in the patriarchal social system. They wanted to please the boys, change for them, wear makeup and use other means to get the attention of the boys; the boys' attention was a way of defining success.

In our talk about teachers, these feminist yet male-centered ideas surfaced:

> "The teacher should give assignments to boys and girls always, they don't trust girls and boys together, they never put us together."
>
> "teachers are prejudiced against girls."
>
> "[teachers] always have the boys carry things, they think that girls are the weak ones, we are just as strong,"
>
> "the teachers praise boys more,"
>
> "she [a certain teacher] doesn't have a favorite except for the boys."
>
> "[Teachers] should make it so girls and boys become friends."

The girls noticed the male privilege going on within their parochial school and the patriarchal nature of Catholicism. The authority of the women in the school, ironically, played a central role inthe perpetuation of patriarchal oppression.

> "I think the boys are off the hook in this school because there are no men except the priests."

The girls noted that they were limited in ways that the boys were not (e.g. teacher attention, differential dress code rules) and were not allowed to do things that the girls felt girls should be able to do (e.g. wear makeup, jewelry, pantyhose). At times, the girls surprised me in that they were very aware of the male privilege and therefore, sexism within the school. At the same time, they played into the validation of gender differences and male privilege by focusing on pleasing the boys as a group, and by having boys as a central theme or reference in their discussions.

The girls' male-orientation does not mean that they ignore their friendships with girls. Instead their difference from the boys gave them a sense of their femininity, a way of defining themselves; they are oriented to pleasing the boys. Yet at the same time they compete with each other for attention from the boys and trust each other more than the boys. In this way the girls constitute an example of the reproduction of the contradictory lived lives of females under patriarchal power. Patriarchal power is found in the social meanings that are given to sexual/biological differences and takes many forms such as the sexual division of labor and internalized, socially created norms of femininity (Weedon, 1987) and is evidenced by the dependency of the girls' identity on the males.

The girls are at a critical age in the development of their identities. As an educator, I believe identity formation and gender studies need to be an explicit part of the curriculum in schools. Feminists teaching such courses could show how males are used as the privileged reference point for understanding females. Rather than promoting hegemonic gender relations through the hidden curriculum, they could demonstrate that the ideologies that construct the idea of gender are based on unequal power relationships instead of democratic ones. This would promote critical thinking about the ways in which this situation can be transformed into a more democratic and equal one.

The main point is that the girls in this study submit to patriarchal power by thinking about themselves through their interactions with the boys, that is, they use "man as the measure." Their lived contradictions and feelings under patriarchal power were stifled by the school and its agenda; there was no space within their school day where they could discuss the oppression of women as they were experiencing it. The girls were stuck in a contradictory situation. They felt they were being dealt something unfair, were not able to find a space where they could

verbalize their in-common thoughts, and continued to participate in that situation because it was at the same time gratifying.

The Commercials

This kind of male-identification came in loud and clear while I was flipping through the channels on my television in early December. I saw two back-to-back commercials representative and illustrative of the girls' situation. One commercial is targeted to women and the other to men. Both commercials use the plight of two "unsuccessful" early teens who begin to drink milk and become "successful" older teenagers.

The first milk commercial I saw began with a scene of a young man dressed in a football uniform. He was sitting on a comfortable chair, watching television. He had the VCR remote control in hand and was playing a tape of himself. He said "this is me" and played a short scenario that showed a small adolescent male being shoved into high school lockers by some larger, more muscular male classmates. But then, apparently he began to drink milk. The camera's focus goes back to our football player and he says "but now here I am" and on the VCR he plays another video of himself. This time he is standing in a school hallway, no high school males are threatening his physical security and "pretty" girls have gathered around him. During the whole camera shot, he glares into the camera and lifts his chin, never looking at the girls who have gathered around him. His ego is at its fullest because he is now considered successful. His success is define because he has overcome his physical weakness. He was unsuccessful because he was weak and he is now successful because he is strong. His strength protects him physically and, as an added plus, he also attracts women. He rewinds the VCR tape and replays the scene; he looks proud of himself. The audience for this commercial is high school males. The message is clear, if males drink milk they will grow up to be strong and

macho and, as a secondary benefit, attract women. His development's exposure on Prime Time television suggests that for males to be considered successful, they must develop a strong [macho] 'self.'

As I digested what was operating in this commercial, another milk commercial appeared but instead of the male on the chair watching a video of himself it was a female. This sparked my curiosity. Were the commercial makers just putting a female in a position where the male had been? No. The milk commercial with the female portrayed her much differently than the commercial with the male. As she lounges on the chair holding the remote control I first noticed her long flowing hair and makeup. Her commercial began to mimic the male's as she said "this was me." On the TV screen was a young woman at a dance. She was not getting shoved into a locker as the male had been; her physical body was not being overtly threatened. Instead her inferiority is marked by her inability to attract men. She could not get a date and no men approached her at the dance. She stood there near the dance floor, all alone in her preppy attire. She had long straight hair, a shirt covering her neck and no make-up on. But then she began to drink milk. In the next scene she plays a scene on the VCR that shows her visibly older, in a low cut dress with makeup on with many men around her. She looks to the men at her right and then left. Back in her viewing position, she says "let's see that again," and rewinds and replays the scene with all of the men around her. She is visibly proud at viewing all of the men who are looking her over. She is being objectified by them and yet, to her, they are proof that she is "successful."

Her identity is marked by her ability to attract men, her inferiority and success defined relative to them. Her identity as a successful female is socially and personally defined only when using man as the reference point. She is successful because she overcame her weakness of not being able to attract men by pleasing men, by being dependent on them for her success, by having them pay attention to

her. The male was successful because he became strong; he overcame his physical weakness, and hence attracted women, not because he attracted women.

Both commercials were male-centered because they both valued the attention of males over females; the subjects of each commercial were male-centered, were centered on male attention and objectified women. The commercial makers also divided the audience of each commercial by representing male and female teens differently. They have produced differences between them by genderizing the content of each commercial and, therefore, the audience of each commercial. By doing that, the commercial makers reproduce patriarchal relations; the ideological domination of men over women.

The Girls, the Commercials and Patriarchy

The commercials are representative of what the 12 sixth grade girls demonstrated, "Men do and women are." Both the study and the female commercial concentrated on pleasing the male, and were seen as successful to each other when gaining the attention of the boys. They were upset at the school for not letting them exert their femininity by wearing jewelry, earrings, makeup and pantyhose, and dependent on the quality of the boys for defining their femininity.

The position of the female identity relative to males and the confidence and independent strength of the male identity in the milk commercials is similar to the findings of the study on sixth grade girls' identity construction. Both the study and the commercials represent women as having male-centered identities. It is the females' position relative to the males that gives them a sense of their feminine identity, a way of defining themselves and their success. They were both oriented to pleasing the males and dependent on the males for success. The main point is that the females think about themselves through their interactions with males, that is, they use "man as the measure." The notions that women are defined relative to men and are seen as objects, as commodities, (Irigaray, 1985), rather than as subjects,

frequent feminist literature. As demonstrated through the dependency of the girls' identity formation in the study "women begin early in life with this sense that we aren't right." Chapkins goes on to point out that "during childhood the identification of woman as Others and less lays the groundwork for all forms of inequality" (Chapkins, 1986, p. 6).

Although the representation of women in TV commercials and adult and children's television have made some gains, men and women continue to be portrayed in traditional male-centered, gender stereotyped roles, men being frequently more powerful and independent and women holding more inferior, passive positions.[3] Traditional roles have been and continue to be repressive for women. If women's lives continue to be limited then so is social freedom limited. Some literature suggests that children are not passive recipients of televised cultural messages (Durkin & Akhar, 1983), yet oppressive male-centered messages and relations continue because they have been seen as legitimate.

Ideologies come to be legitimated through those who have the power to promote and control such messages. Hegemonic patriarchal relations are perpetuated through ideologies of social relations that are considered legitimate and have benefited a select group of white, able-bodied, heterosexual, European men, and, as Elizabeth Ellsworth shows, have patriarchy at their root. She says, "Literary criticism, cultural studies, post-structuralism, feminist studies, comparative studies, and media studies have by now amassed overwhelming evidence of the extent to

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[3] See the following references from Pusch, W. S. (1992). *Annotated Bibliography on Women's Roles as Presented by the Media.* An Unpublished Manuscript. Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Bretl, D. J. & Cantor, J. (1988). The portrayal of men and women in U. S. television commercials: A recent content analysis and trends over 15 years, *Sex Roles,* 18(9/10), 595-609. Downs, A. C. & Gowan, D. C. (1980). Sex differences in reinforcement and punishment on prime time television, *Sex Roles,* 6(5), 683-694. Loydal, L. T. (1989). Sex role messages in television commercials: An update. *Sex Roles,* 21(11/12), 715-724. Peirce, K. (1989). Sex role stereotyping of children on television: A content analysis of the roles and attributes of child characters, *Sociological Spectrum,* 9(3), 321-328. Signorielli, N. (1989). Television and conceptions about sex roles: Maintaining conventionality and the status quo, *Sex Roles,* 21(5/6), 341-360.

which the myths of the ideal rational person and the 'universality' of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, middle-upper class, able-bodied, thin and heterosexual" (1989). Many people come to accept traditional, patriarchal roles because they are taught to do so. Such expectations are made explicit, and many are implicit, in our society. How can such social relations be influenced to become such that patriarchal domination and exploitation are not tolerated?

To control or censor material, whether in the media or in the classroom, is not the answer. Censorship and control does not change the dialectical process of social learning, that people learn about how they should understand their lives from others and themselves. Nor does censorship and control assist people in understanding why they think in the ways that they do, why they have formed their identity in the way they have and how and why they can have agency in their own and others lives and facilitate changes. Censorship is a band-aid on a much larger problem. What is needed is a pedagogical framework within which to teach people to think, examine and question their own socialization in alternative public spheres. Only then are we able to examine and understand the underlying and submerged assumptions that authoritize existing oppressive structures; we can begin to form alternative ones where people come together to consciously form the bases on which they act and the bases on which they reconstruct their own social and individual identities. Nancy Fraser clarifies this by explaining that "Alternative public spheres are central not only for creating the conditions for the formation and enactment of social identities, but also for enabling the conditions in which social equality and cultural diversity coexist with participatory democracy" (Fraser, 1990). Henry Giroux builds on this notion: "It is through the development of such public spheres that the discourses of democracy and freedom can address what it means to educate students for forms of citizenship forged in a politics of difference" (1992).

When the content of what is taught is stressed in schools rather than a way of thinking about that content, the assumptions underlying that content, and the way in which that content is represented, the content is made central to the exclusion of thinking. When examining, analyzing, and questioning are relegated to the periphery of pedagogy, the content is not criticized but taken for granted, and, for the most part, accepted. The depth of the content is never explored because to do so one must analyze. People are kept ignorant because they are kept ignorant of the processes of learning, teaching, and forming their identities; they are kept ignorant because they are never able to examine the content- how they come to understand themselves - e.g. how they come to understand "female."

Oppressive patriarchal structures are continually perpetuating themselves through teaching which emphasizes not how people are learning the content, but only the content itself. People loose the ability to see their position in a different light and as it might be otherwise. Maxine Greene's wisdom characterizes what a person in this situation needs. "There has to be a surpassing of a constraining or deficient 'reality,' actually perceived as deficient by a person or persons looking from their particular vantage points on the world. Made conscious of lacks, they may move (in their desire to repair them) toward a 'field of possibilities,' what is possible or realizable for them" (1988, p. 5). Deborah Britzman builds on this notion by explaining that the power to imagine things otherwise is lost when ability to see the multiplicity of our lives does not exist. "What makes this reality [teaching and learning] so contradictory is the fact that teaching and learning have multiple and conflicting meanings that shift with our lived lives, with the theories produced and encountered, with the deep convictions and desires brought to and created in education, with the practice we negotiate, and the identities we construct. This is not the problem. Rather, when such multiplicity is suppressed, so too is our power to imagine how things could be otherwise" (1988, p. 10). In other words, the power of

patriarchy has constructed social living such that people do not recognize its multiple and contradictory meanings and thus continue to perpetuate its legitimation. People are not taught to question the legitimacy and assumptions of patriarchy. In this way, the conditions necessary for empowering people to choose and act on understanding of the multiple and contradictory meanings is denied, because they are kept ignorant-they are not taught in schools to think critically about who they are, how and why they think in the ways that they do, how they can think of a different world, and how they can have agency in their own and others' lives.

Educators need to use a pedagogy that supports this kind of thinking for liberatory purposes. This pedagogy should envision the emancipation of those groups who have felt the oppressive structures of patriarchy, namely those not European, male, heterosexual, thin, able-bodied. According to Chris Weedon (1987), socialist feminism envisages a new social order through a full transformation of the patriarchal social system. They see patriarchy as integrally tied in with class and racial oppressions which can only be abolished through a full transformation of the social system. Socialist feminism see gender as socially produced and historically changing. This feminism fits with the idea of a pedagogy for liberation from a patriarchy which continues to benefit a small group of heterosexual white men.

A Critical Feminist Pedagogy

To look at patriarchal power in the educational sphere for specifically liberatory purposes requires a sensitivity to what Sola and Bennett (1985) call the school as "a site of ideological struggle." It is where "learning how to write and think take on implicit political dimensions." This means incorporating a view of social living and learning as inherently political, keeping in mind that the context, content, and language is also political. This recognition, when applied to individual students, asks questions of whose context, content, and language the student and the teacher use, and why they find this one appropriate and that one inappropriate. This means

questioning the self and others and learning to listen to others voices rather than denying others that privilege. this means questioning the use of the males gaze, why women always feel watched by it and a need to compete for the attention of males for success.

Within this type of pedagogical framework students delve into the politics of difference and representation to realize that all knowledge is partial and ridden with complex relations of power. The construction of such a paradigm produces a filter through which those people see the world. Once people become self conscious and reflective about the political nature of social relationships and experience, such as learning, they act more deliberately, rather than with ignorance and on ill founded assumptions. They are now aware of the politics involved in social relations and sensitive to it in all areas of their lives, like watching milk commercials. And they have claimed the power to imagine things otherwise, to imagine the construct of the "female identity" otherwise.

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